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Hurricane Gustav heads for Louisiana

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Gulf coast areas of the USA remain on high alert as Hurricane Gustav heads towards the Louisiana coast, where it is expected to make landfall around midday US time on Monday.

Gustav is currently a Category 3 hurricane with wind speeds of near 115 m.p.h. and is expected to remain this strength as it approaches the coast.

Torrential rain of between 6 to 12 inches (150-300 mm) is expected over parts of Louisiana, southern and western Mississippi, Arkansas and north-eastern Texas, with isolated amounts of 20 inches (500 mm) possible. An extremely dangerous storm surge of 10 to 14 feet above normal tidal levels is expected near and to the east of where the centre of Gustav crosses the coast.

The storm has already claimed the lives of more than 80 people as it crossed the Caribbean, causing widespread damage in Haiti, the Dominican Republic and Jamaica. At least 300,000 people were evacuated in Cuba as the storm brought extensive flooding and some severe damage.

Meanwhile Tropical Storm Hanna continues to threaten the central and south-eastern Bahamas. Winds are currently around 50 m.p.h. with higher gusts.

The Met Office provides forecast information of tropical storms and hurricanes from its unified model twice daily to its colleagues at the National Hurricane Center (NHC) in Miami. This valuable information is used by forecasters in the NHC when compiling the official forecasts of track and landfall of hurricanes and tropical storms such as Gustav and Hanna, and the issue of warnings to affected areas.

The latest forecast shows Tropical Storm Gustav tracking north-west into the Gulf of Mexico and Tropical Storm Hanna moving westwards towards the Bahamas. British holiday makers and those with friends and family in the Caribbean and southern USA will be paying close attention to the NHC advice and warnings for wind, rain and storm surges.

The Met Office has a responsibility to protect the lives of British citizens abroad and issues regular briefings to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) for tropical cyclones around the globe throughout the year. In addition the Met Office provides forecast information to humanitarian agencies and the insurance industry, giving advanced notice for mitigating action.

The latest forecast tracks can be found at the National Hurricane Center website.

More about tropical cyclones

Notes:

- The Met Office is also providing forecast information on the progress of Gustav and Hanna to government departments to help deal with the situation. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Department for International Development (DFID) are responsible for issuing advice to British Nationals in the area.

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